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WEST-INDIAN PRETENSIONS REFUTED;

BEING

AN EXTRACT FROM THE PREFACE

OF

A WORK,

ENTITLED

THE SLAVERY OF THE BRITISH WEST-INDIA COLONIES

DELINEATED,

AS IT EXISTS IN LAW AND PRACTICE,

AND

COMPARED WITH THE SLAVERY

OF OTHER COUNTRIES, ANCIENT AND MODERN,

BY

JAMES STEPHEN, ESQ.

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FOR THE

SOCIETY FOR THE MITIGATION AND GRADUAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY THROUGHOUT THE BRITISH DOMINIONS.

1824.

WEST-INDIAN PRETENSIONS REFUTED.

THE public are aware that a work has recently appeared, from the pen of Mr. Stephen, entitled, "The Slavery of the British West-India Colonies, delineated as it exists both in Law and Practice, and compared with the Slavery of other Countries, Antient and Modern." Of this important work, only the first volume, being a delineation of the state in point of law, has yet appeared. It is impossible to appreciate too highly the value of this publication, which exposes, with a masterly hand, the various evils of colonial bondage; as well as the absurd pretensions of the petty oligarchy of Whites who compose the colonial assemblies, to a separate and independent right of legislation, in all matters affecting the Negro population of our colonies. The following is an extract from the preface to Mr. Stephen's work, on this and some kindred subjects, which will not fail to be read with lively interest by all the enemies of Slavery; and first, as to the propriety of publicly discussing the subject.—

"But have not public discussions in England on these subjects, it may be asked, produced insurrections in the West Indies?

"Before I answer the question, let us assume that such is the fact, and examine calmly the justice of those consequences for which its assertors contend. Are seven hundred thousand human beings, subjects of Great Britain, with their future offspring, to be held for ever in such a dreadful and destructive state as this work describes, because their deliverance from it may not be unattended with some portion of evil? Then let the

physician and the surgeon abjure their professions; for what cure was ever effected of an inveterate and dangerous malady, without some degree of temporary evil to the patient?

"That without public discussion in this country, Slavery will never be abolished, or effectually alleviated, no fair man who attends to the admitted facts of the case will dispute. The colonists themselves, for the most part, virtually admit it. They boast indeed of having already meliorated greatly the condition of their Slaves, by laws which the reader of the following work will learn how to appreciate: but whatever be the value of their meliorating acts, to discussions in this country they are confessedly to be ascribed; or at least to recommendations from Parliament and the Crown, which, without such discussions, would not have been obtained.

"The Assemblies have not even affected in general to represent their boasted reforms as spontaneous, or to conceal that they were made in compliance with the sense of Parliament, and of the Executive Government: some of the acts themselves recite that such were the motives of their authors.

"Let me add, that if these ostensible improvements were really carried into practice, or had a tenth part of the value which the colonial apologists attribute to them, they would be cheaply purchased at the expense of greater temporary evils by far than the insurrections at Demerara and Barbadoes.

"Does any man seriously expect, that if public discussion in this country were now to be abandoned, those old laws would be made effectual, and improvements of far greater importance introduced by the free choice of colonial legislators? If so, let him attend to the lessons of experience."

"Others may entertain or profess what hopes they please. They may suppose, perhaps, that the Assemblies are not in earnest in their loud and vehement indignation against the proposed measures and their authors; but, for my part, though I should forget the testimony of experience, I know too well the composition and character of those bodies ever to expect from them any thing better than such temporising expedients, to avert the interposition of Parliament, as have hitherto been successfully employed. Indeed, as to the most important reformations of the fatal existing system, and without which depopulation or a renewed Slave Trade must be the no-distant lot of our sugar colonies, I have always held that the Assem-

blies, if they had the *will*, have not the *power* to make them. I am sure, at least, that such is the case in all our old islands; except, perhaps, Jamaica; and I do not know or believe that it is otherwise even there *.

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* "That the Assemblies possess not the *power* of effectual reformation, is a truth which I do not expect my readers in general will be prepared fully to understand and admit, till I shall have laid before them such statistical information as properly belongs to the second division of this work. But I will here subjoin a few remarks, rather serving to shew my meaning in the proposition, than to prove its truth.

"The Assemblies, in the smaller islands at least, are generally composed of men dependent for their subsistence on the system proposed to be reformed; and to whose hopes in life the immediate correction of it would be fatal. They are, besides, too intimately connected with, and dependent on, the small free communities they represent, to oppose themselves in earnest to their general voice; or to venture on measures so offensive to their White brethren, as all effectual laws would be, the objects of which avowedly were to raise the Negroes in the social scale, and, by preparing a future abolition of Slavery itself, to reduce the proud and gainful ascendency of the privileged class. Meliorating acts, incapable of being enforced, and known to be framed for the sole purpose of averting parliamentary interference, are easily borne with; but the man who, in one of those petty assemblies, should attempt to realize the benevolent ideas and plans of the British Government, would be a hardy philanthropist indeed. If he did not escape, like the late Barbadoes Missionary, by flight, he would probably have to feed the flames of his own mansion kindled by a popular torch.

"The late destruction of the Methodist chapel in Barbadoes, is too plain an illustration of my meaning, to be here passed unnoticed. It was an outrage perpetrated openly in the face of the sun; and, as has been stated without contradiction, continued during two successive days; and this in the chief town, the seat of the local government, which durst not interpose. I say durst not, because it is due to the Governor to presume, that he would have upheld the authority of the laws, and the respect due to himself, as his Majesty's representative, but for the fear of greater mischief. He had no doubt, as usual, a military force within call; but the *petits Blancs*, or White mobility, of Bridgetown, were too formidable to be opposed. They have also, it seems, since set the laws and the government at defiance. A Black mob which sets fire to a cane-piece, is punished, we may observe, in that country, with the slaughter of hundreds of the rioters in the field, and multitudes afterwards on the gibbet; but a White mob may pull down buildings in the capital town, without resistance, and brave the government afterwards, with perfect impunity and triumph.

"The bold innovator whom I have imagined, would have also to confront dangers, or rather to submit to certain consequences, not less deterring, though of a different kind,—I mean such as would affect his own private property, or that of his employers, and the security or satisfaction of their creditors.

"Here I build on ground not yet fully rescued from controversy and popular mistake. I ask no credit, therefore, I repeat, for these views at present, but wish only that they should be understood.

"What I mean is, that the members of these insular assemblies, being on an average, I think, about twenty in number, and in some islands considerably less, are for the most part either planters deeply encumbered with debt, or managers and other dependents of such planters. Now if Slavery cannot be lightened, and progressively abolished, without present sacrifices such as they or their needy employers cannot

" But this is more than I am under any necessity of proving. It is enough for my purpose that the will at least is wanting; and that the general disinclination of the Assemblies to the work in question cannot be overcome without a continuance of those discussions in the mother country which they affect to deprecate; or without parliamentary legislation, which is the only effect of such discussions that they really fear, and sincerely desire to avert.

" Now, if this cruel and fatal system of Slavery cannot be effectually mitigated or terminated without public discussions on the subject, I repeat, and am prepared to maintain, that these necessary means not only may warrantably be used, but cannot innocently be abstained from, by those who view the system in its true nature and effects; even though it should be demonstrated that insurrections have been occasioned by, and are likely again to ensue from, them. If the waste of human life alone were taken into account, this conclusion would still be undeniably just; for the numbers that perish annually from the effects of that destructive system are greater than those which have been destroyed by insurrections and their consequences in the course of fifty years.

" In a right view, such melancholy events as those of Demerara and Barbadoes strengthen, instead of opposing, the duty of reformation; for how dreadful is that system which we

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afford to make; if, for instance, labour must be lessened, and sustenance increased (without which the fatal decrease of plantation Slaves by mortality cannot be prevented), at the price of reducing the sugar crops, and augmenting the current expenses on estates that barely now enable their owners to keep down the interest of the incumbrances; upon what principle can it be expected that he or his manager should propose or vote for laws, by which such painful sacrifices would be imposed? Not upon a feeling of humanity, certainly; for that would have led to their voluntary adoption:—not on a provident regard to the future interests of the estate; for it must soon cease to be his.

" The case of the constituents, too, is not in general different. To a large proportion of the planters in our old sugar colonies, present diminution of net proceeds would infallibly induce a speedy foreclosure or sale.

" These views, doubtless, shew the difficulty of effectual reform to be extremely great. It is a truth that I have never desired to conceal or extenuate. To Parliament itself, the work would be difficult to reconcile the relief or preservation of the Slaves with the present interest of their owners, and the rights of their mortgagees; but to the Assemblies it would be quite impossible. In that most essential point of reform, the enforcing an adequate allowance of food from the Planters to their Slaves, some of them have virtually, if not expressly, avowed it."—(See pp. 89—106, and Appendix No. III.)

can alone maintain by an enormous effusion of human blood, and in a cause which we feel to be in its origin unjust, whenever the slightest movement of resistance or insubordination occurs! If it was necessary to kill on the spot, on the late occasion, two hundred human beings, and to consign great numbers besides to the public executioner; to what but the state of Negro Slavery can that harsh necessity be ascribed?

" Let it be supposed, for the argument's sake, that all the absurd calumnies which have been propagated as to the origin of the commotion are true. The more, if so, were the poor ignorant victims to be pitied. Their object was only to claim that removal or alleviation of a galling yoke which they had been taught, it is alleged, to believe the sovereign power had ordained for them. Still, what had they done? Not shed a drop of blood, nor burnt a house or a cane-piece. The dreadful exigencies of the system, therefore, can alone be alleged in excuse of the extensive military massacre, and subsequent executions. A similar tumult in this country would probably not have cost the rioters a single life.

" The colonial partisans seem to wish us to believe, not only that discussions in this country, and the instigations of Missionaries, have been the causes of these events, but that these are the only causes from which insurrections are ever to be apprehended. But what security will they give us that perseverance in the existing system will be unattended with similar disasters in future, as they have so often been at former periods? Before the quiet of a silently destructive oppression was disturbed by any such discussions, or paganism and barbarism on the plantations were invaded by one charitable ray of Christian light, insurrections were far more frequent than they have since been; and Guiana, too, was always their favourite region. Plots and conspiracies, real or imaginary, were familiar occurrences in almost every island; and often have our brave soldiers been employed in the odious and pestilent service of suppressing, not a mere plantation broil, or local riot finished in an hour, but wide-spread and long-continued insurrections. He must be a very young reader who does not recollect such cases in Grenada and Dominica, Saint Vincents and Jamaica. As to mutinies on particular estates, and imputed conspiracies for which Slaves have been convicted and executed as rebels, those who have long resided in the West Indies well know the fre-

quency of such occurrences; but they used to be, for the most part, unheard of in Europe. The times were, when there were no motives for treating these cases with measures alarming in their character, and expensive in their consequences, such as calling out the militia, for any ultra violence or severity against the offenders; for giving exaggerated accounts of such ordinary fruits of Slavery; or for trumpeting them for months together in the ears of the British public.

" The chief novelty in the cases of Barbadoes and Demerara, supposing the alleged causes to have been the true ones, is this,—that the British arms have been more justifiably employed in shedding the blood of our Black fellow-subjects than formerly; because the tendency and the object has been, not to perpetuate the full weight of an unjust and hopeless bondage, but to preserve the means of its peaceful and progressive termination.

" Having premised these remarks, I proceed to give the question of fact before proposed a direct and candid answer.

" I will not affirm that public discussions in this country have, in no sense, produced the late insurrections in the West Indies; because it may be true, though attested only on very suspicious evidence, that mistakes as to the true intentions or actual measures of Parliament, influenced the insurgents, both at Barbadoes and Demerara; and certainly it was from public discussions here that the interpositions of Parliament and of the Crown, the alleged subjects of misconception by the Negroes on those occasions, arose. The register plan would not have been recommended to the Colonies in the one instance, nor the disuse of the driving whip, &c. in the other, if the merits of those measures had not first been freely discussed both in and out of Parliament; and if those offensive measures had never been recommended by the mother country, the White Colonists would not have had any motive for raising that local tempest, and propagating those violent misrepresentations and clamours throughout the West Indies, by which alone, if in any way, the Blacks were deceived. They would not have been rash enough to proclaim in the ears of their Slaves that a general emancipation was intended for them by Parliament, or by their friends in Europe, if their aversion to the measures really proposed had not been a feeling too powerful to be subdued or regulated by the ordinary suggestions of prudence. The discussions in

question, therefore, though not the proximate or direct cause of the insurrections, may, in one sense, be said to have produced them, by having given rise to those public measures in this country which furnished the subjects of clamour and misrepresentation on the part of the masters, and, through their imprudence, gave occasion, perhaps, to a fatal misconception by the Slaves.

" In this view, these discussions stood nearly in the same causal relation to the mischief, that the preaching and writing of the pious fathers of our church did to the fires of Mary's age in Smithfield. But if Latimer and Ridley had been taxed by their persecutors with this fatal consequence, we may conceive what would have been their reply. ' The primary cause ' of all,' they might have said, ' was your own corruptions in ' doctrine and practice, which our public discussions were the ' only possible means of reforming; and now, these barbarous ' executions, which you strangely impute to us, are the effects ' of your own bigoted and relentless adherence to those abuses, ' long after their reformation has been voted by Parliament, and ' called for by the general sense of the English people. They ' are the direct and immediate fruits of your furious rage against ' the reformers, and of the fatal delusions practised by you on ' the minds of those who possess the civil power,—the slaves of ' superstition, whom you despotically govern; and whom you ' have taught to misconceive our true principles, and falsely to ' impute to us mischievous designs.'

" Whether these intrepid friends of spiritual freedom would have so answered or not, of one thing we are sure,—they would not have been deterred by such reproaches from persisting in their appeals to the understandings and the consciences of their countrymen; or consented to avert from themselves or others, further evils of the same terrible nature, by an abandonment of their sacred cause.

" Some of my readers, perhaps, may still conceive, that allowing public discussion to be on these views justifiable, it has ceased, under existing circumstances, to be clearly necessary without the walls of Parliament; because a powerful Government, in concurrence with the voice of the Commons, is pledged for an effectual reformation.

" I admit that the important and valuable pledge was given; and that we are now warranted by it to expect that Parliament

will at length take into its own hands the work which the subordinate legislatures neither will nor can perform.

" The case which the Right Honourable Secretary of State, who moved the resolutions, described and deprecated, has arisen. Instead of '*a full and fair co-operation*' there is '*resistance*,' and a resistance which '*partakes not of reason, but of contumacy**.'

" It may be hoped, therefore, that his Majesty's Government will act in consequence, as Mr. Canning intimated under the terms of '*coming down to Parliament for counsel.*' But I cannot be sure that such will be their conduct: and if I were, the publication of this work would nevertheless appear to me an indispensable duty; because a most obstinate opposition is preparing on the part of the Colonies; and because I am satisfied, and certainly know, that the members of the legislature in general, and even ministers themselves, will, in the discussions that must ensue, stand in need of much information, such as is here offered to them, as to the true nature and character of the state in regard to which they will be called upon to legislate. In that case, no difference will be found between the practical views of Government and my own: and my labours will only have tended to the promotion of our common objects in the best and safest way; for though it has been artfully and most assiduously represented, that I and my fellow-labourers in the cause of the Slaves were discontented with the measures approved by the Right Honourable Secretary of State, and that we aim at rash and precipitate changes, beyond those to which, specifically, he has given the high sanction of his opinion as proper for immediate adoption in the Colonies, that representation, like most other statements from the same quarter, is utterly false.

" We were dissatisfied, indeed, with a new reference to the Assemblies; and I challenge any fair man who attends to the facts I have generally adverted to here, and proved in the following work, to deny that we had abundant reason to be so. We foresaw that it would prove a new *slogan*, or war-cry in the West Indies; which would certainly produce new clamours, and perhaps new mischief, but lead to no one useful result. We regarded it as an unjustifiable delegation of duties which Par-

* " Speech of Mr. Canning, in the debate of May 15th."

liament itself was bound to perform. We thought, and still think, that, after experiments of thirty years' duration, the dignity as well as justice of the supreme Legislature was compromised by such a course; and that the most insulting, as well as absurd of all unconstitutional pretensions, that of an exclusive right of internal legislation in the Assemblies, was countenanced at least, if not virtually admitted. That pretension, indeed, is one which Mr. Canning himself has repeatedly protested against; and certainly no British statesman or lawyer, or any rational man who has considered the subject, will venture, on this side of the Atlantic, to defend it. It is a pretension which the potent North-American Colonies, now the United States, never advanced, till they laid claim to independence itself; and which this country, in her most earnest efforts for a necessary conciliation with them, was so far from admitting, that she expressly reserved her opposite rights, even in that very statute in which she abandoned the whole original ground of quarrel,—the practice of internal taxation; a statute to which, notwithstanding, the sugar colonies have the confidence to appeal in support of this preposterous claim.

"To admit such a pretension would be to lay down the imperial sceptre at the foot of every petty assembly. It would be to place this great empire at best in the state of an inferior or vassal ally, such as Napoleon once made of the feeble powers around him; for it is noticed by the most eminent writers on public law, as a criterion of such an inferiority, and its most humiliating incident, that the inferior must assist with his arms in every quarrel in which the superior thinks fit to engage, without any power to put a negative upon unjust aggression, or to examine the merits of the case. He is to be dragged through the mire of iniquity and blood, whenever his injurious confederate proceeds, and commands him to follow.

"Such precisely, in protecting the Colonial Whites against the Slaves, would be the odious and degrading duties of this great country, if she subscribed to these arrogant claims. They deny us the right of controlling that interior oppression, resistance to which we are nevertheless bound to repress even by the most costly and sanguinary means.

"True, these pretensions have not been expressly admitted by our statesmen; and are in point of theory denied. But what has been the practice? Just the same as if they had been

formally allowed. I speak not of former times, nor even of our own days prior to the abolition controversy; but in every thing since that period, which has had relation to Slavery, Parliament has been bearded with bold denials of its legislative power; and has always tamely given way, even in cases in which it could not be contended that the separate local legislatures could give full and convenient effect to the measures in question; measures proposed or approved of by his Majesty's Government, and by Parliament itself.

" Such emphatically was the case of the bill for the Registration of Slaves.

" I have elsewhere shewn, and by arguments to which no answer, I believe, has ever been given or attempted, that a Slave Registry, in order to be efficacious, must be established by parliamentary authority; because that alone can prescribe rules, and ordain sanctions and remedies, operative alike in every colony, governing their mutual maritime intercourse, and capable of being enforced on the high seas, and in courts of universal jurisdiction. The measure also being a necessary supplement to the Abolition of the Slave Trade, and resting on the same high principles with that glorious reformation, was in its nature one for which the character of Parliament, and the honour of the British people, were responsible; and which we were therefore bound to make effectual. Yet colonial clamours and alarms, precisely of the same kind that are now again employed, prevailed over every argument, whether drawn from national honour, from consistency, reason, or justice; and this rear-guard of the abolition was sent to be formed and organized by the Assemblies themselves; with earnest recommendations, I admit, in its favour from Parliament, and from the Crown; but addressed to the same Assemblies which had for twenty years effectually resisted the Abolition, and some of whom had protested against it to the last, even after it had passed into a law.

" The effect was such as might easily have been foreseen, and as the friends of the measure predicted. The plan was partially and ostensibly adopted in twenty different forms; but all so grossly defective, as to make it worse than useless. A measure which, to be effectual in any of our islands, must be made so in all, was no where adopted without fatal mutilations and defects. These evasions were publicly exposed. The pro-

moters and authors of the measure disclaimed those impotent and impracticable substitutes for it; and demonstrated that they were all calculated, not only to elude its salutary effects, but to bring the plan itself into disrepute *.

" Meantime all objections to the principle of the measure had been progressively abandoned by the Assemblies themselves. Several of them even had taken credit for it, as an important improvement in their Slave Laws, and as affording undeniable security against clandestine Slave-trade. The Government also had, in its diplomatic negociations relative to that trade with foreign powers, relied upon the system of Slave Registration as an essential guard of the Abolition, and solicited its adoption as such in the colonies of France; a request with which that power had intimated a disposition to comply.

" Can a case be imagined, then, in which it could be more incumbent on Parliament, upon every principle which should

* " I ought not here to forbear quoting the following passages from the Review of these Colonial Register Acts, published by the African Institution, in its Report of February 22d, 1820.

" ' But whatever the motives may have been, the conduct of the Assemblies has at ' least well justified those predictions in your former Report on this subject, of which ' they so strongly complained. You said, ' *The work, if left to them, certainly will* ' *not be done.*' You added, ' *Should the fear of the mother country taking the work* ' *into her hands now produce a less openly contumacious spirit than before, the fruits* ' *will be no better than ostensible and impotent laws. Registries would be established,* ' *perhaps; but on such a defective plan, and with such inadequate legal sanctions, that* ' *the desired effect would be lost, and the system itself would be brought into discredit;* ' *nay, would be made, perhaps, a cover for those very frauds which it was designed to* ' *prevent.*'

" ' Let the impartial—nay, let those whose prepossessions in this controversy were ' most strongly on the side of the colonies—fairly compare this anticipation with the ' event, as exhibited in the present Report; and then ask themselves whether your ' application to Parliament was needless, whether the clamours to which it gave rise ' were just, and to whose charge some mischievous effects of those clamours may fairly ' be laid.'

" ' One only of the predictions, here quoted, yet remains to be verified: ' *the system* ' *itself*' is not *yet* ' brought into discredit.'

" ' To prevent this ultimate and fatal consequence, your Committee would earnestly ' recommend, that this Review of the Colonial Register Acts may, without delay, be ' submitted to the British public. Your silence might be construed into an acquies- ' cence in those mutilations and perversions of your plan, which must certainly frustrate ' all its objects, and produce in its operation nothing but inconvenience and mischief.

" ' Your Committee does not hesitate to add, as its clear opinion, that, unless effectual ' measures shall now be taken by Parliament to establish a Slave Registration throughout ' the British West-Indies, on a uniform plan, and with the only adequate executory ' provisions, the plan had better be altogether abandoned.' "

govern the legislature of a great nation, to maintain firmly its authority, than this? Yet the Assemblies have been allowed to trifle on without control, till at length their true object is accomplished; and the last prediction noticed in the Report I have here cited, is more than verified. They have not only '*brought the system itself into discredit*,' but in our largest island the mutilators of it have the effrontery now to ascribe to its authors, the effects of their own insidious work. A bill, it appears, was read a first time, and ordered to be read a second time, without opposition, in the Assembly of Jamaica, in November last, for repealing its Register Act, on the ground of its being '*a troublesome, expensive, and obnoxious measure, and utterly useless*;' a character of it, which the reader, who will not take their word and mine for it, may find to have been abundantly demonstrated, four year ago, in the Report to which I have referred *.

" In the same newspaper from which I derive this intelligence, other articles extracted from the Jamaica Gazettes, hold out the decent intimation that the Assembly will give effect to its repealing act, if disallowed by the Crown, by withholding the supplies necessary for the support of the Registry. They affect to suppose that the promoters of the plan, which they have eluded and ruined, will be outraged at its formal abandonment; and do me the honour to name me among them, certainly by no complimentary epithets, but in very good company,—that of Messrs. Wilberforce, Buxton, and Macaulay, and the noble Earl at the head of the Colonial Department himself. Of his lordship's sentiments on the subject I am wholly uninformed; but can assure them, on my own behalf and that of the three other gentlemen whom they have named, that our only objection to the repeal will be their having delayed it so long; and that we heartily wish all the other Colonial Register Acts had been repealed long ago. Our reasons will be best expressed in the language of the Report which I have cited; ' Not only will ' the system itself, by those futile enactments, be brought into ' discredit, but they will be made, perhaps, a cover for those ' very frauds which it was designed to prevent. Unless, there- ' fore, effectual measures shall now be taken by Parliament, to ' establish a Slave Registration throughout the British West-

* " See pp. 11—13, 41, 45 —75, 86—88, 108—110, &c."

'Indies, on a uniform plan, and with the only adequate 'executory provisions, the plan had better be altogether aban-'doned.'

"Such was the avowed sense of the African Institution four years ago; and such is now my confirmed and most deliberate judgment.

"But I will go further, and with equal sincerity. If Parliament is not now at length prepared to take the work of alleviating, and progressively abolishing Slavery, into its own hands, I heartily wish it would give a direct negative to the petitions; and not again at once mock the hopes of humanity, compromise its own dignity and authority, and excite interminable controversy and mischief, by new references to the Assemblies.

"Among other reasons for the interposition of Parliament, no other power can give equal and fair effect to measures on the necessity or expediency of which the late resolutions were founded. The fatal subdivisions of legislative jurisdiction in the British West-Indies, not less than the general spirit of the legislators, and the local prejudices by which they are fettered, demands the aid of the sole authority that can correct the system at large, in a general and equable way.

"If it had been right to commit the destiny of the unfortunate Slaves to the civil as well as domestic government of their masters, and to assign to them no other lawgivers but those who are themselves accomplices in every general abuse which it is the duty of a legislature to controul, care at least should have been taken to constitute colonial assemblies of as much dignity and liberality of character as our West-Indian possessions, having due regard to their local situation, might afford; and therefore, when a great number of small islands, nearly adjacent to, or at no great distance from, each other, were to be placed under what has been most preposterously called a British Constitution, the maxim should have been to unite and consolidate, instead of subdividing, their legislative jurisdictions.

"But the system has fatally been, not only to give to every newly acquired island, however insignificant in its dimensions and population, a separate governor, and council, and representative assembly; but to divide jurisdictions in the old colonies that were formerly united. The Leeward Charibee Islands, comprising Antigua, Saint Christopher, Montserrat, Nevis,

and Tortola, with their respective small dependencies, which were once represented in one general assembly, and had the same governor and council, have now no less than five local legislatures; though, in respect of most of them, it would be wronging many country parishes of England to say that their vestries were not more fit to be intrusted with full powers of municipal legislation within their respective precincts. The consequences have been a difficulty, needlessly enhanced, of finding liberal and independent members of these legislative bodies; and also their stricter subserviency to the prejudices and particular interests of the petty communities over which they preside.

"Nothing worse than this system could possibly have been contrived to make the condition of the servile class in the British West-Indies completely hopeless, unless it were that abdication of the controlling power of Parliament on which the Assemblies have now the confidence to insist."

"Having thus far stated the reasons which justify my dissent, and that of the friends of colonial reformation in general, from the resolutions of May last, in respect of the fruitless reference to the colonial assemblies, a dissent which experience has too well confirmed, let me express my earnest hope that there will be at length an end of such experiments.

"If it is fit that such a state as is delineated in the following work should remain unmitigated, till the hapless subjects of it perish in their chains, let the House of Commons at once rescind its resolutions, and leave the poor victims to their fate. But if any thing, however small, is to be done for their relief, I trust that Parliament will cease impotently and mischievously to *recommend*, and begin at length to *ordain*.

"What sound objection can now be raised to such effectual interposition?

"Is it that the colonies are clamorous and violent in their protests against it, and that mischief may ensue? The same objections might have been opposed, and indeed long were with fatal success opposed, to the Abolition of the Slave Trade. That measure, also, was treated, by Jamaica and almost every other colony, as 'a direct invasion of their constitutional rights, and as a tyrannical oppression, to which they would never submit.' In that case, also, numerous resolutions of the most audacious kind, bordering on sedition and rebellion, were framed at public meetings, and by the Assemblies themselves.

The measure which the very same men now affect to applaud, and hold inviolable, was arraigned and deprecated, in terms of indignation the most intense that language could convey. Mr. Wilberforce, and its other promoters, were traduced and vilified by libels not less acrimonious than those with which the periodical press has teemed for months past against the same public characters. But Parliament at length did its duty; and what was the result? An immediate cessation of all those idle clamours and alarms, and all that factitious indignation. A growling epilogue from the Jamaica Assembly excepted, scarce a further murmur was heard; and, ere long, the reigning tone in the West Indies was applause of the abolition, and reprobation of the trade which they had so zealously and pertinaciously upheld. They have since not only professed to adopt those very principles which they had before railed against as fanatical and pestilent errors, but have affected to regard every suspicion of the reality and universality of their conversion as a grievous imputation and affront.

"Let Parliament now take the same direct and manly course, and we shall soon find a similar event. We shall only have to defend ourselves against the charge of having deferred the salutary work too long. These consistent colonists have had the modesty to accuse us of late years, for so long maintaining the Slave Trade. They have alleged that it was a British, not a Colonial, iniquity; and we may hereafter expect to hear from them, that the protraction of Slavery also was the crime solely of the parent state.

"Of the indecent menaces which Jamaica and other islands have again resorted to, it would be difficult to speak with temper, if they were not too ridiculous to excite any grave emotions.

"They will renounce their allegiance!!! If so, we shall have to subdue them by a new and cheap mode of warfare; not by sending out troops, but withdrawing them. The most terrible of all hostile operations, would be the leaving them to themselves. They *threaten* us with a saving, even in the present pacific times, of at least a million per annum, and the lives of multitudes of brave soldiers and seamen, who are continually perishing in their hospitals, and in the ships of war employed in their defence.

"They will assert their independence of us!!! Then I trust they will allow *us* also to become independent of *them*; and a

rich boon it would be. The people of England would be *punished* by saving two millions a year which we now pay in the price of sugar, through their monopoly of our markets, after every pretence of reciprocity has ceased. The manufacturers and merchants of England would be further punished, by reaping a copious harvest in every foreign region in which sugar is produced. They would no longer have to abandon to rivals on the European continent, or in the United States, the copious supply of Cuba, and in a great measure of Brazil. By taking returns in sugar, we should nearly monopolize the import trade of both. I am far from recommending, indeed, our so encouraging the agriculture of countries which still adhere to the Slave Trade; but it is probable that the boon of supplying the British market might effectually second our instances with them for the renunciation of that commerce. We might also regain, and engross, the very valuable commerce of Hayti, which, in complaisance to Jamaica, we have foolishly renounced. Above all, we should be enabled to cultivate in the East the richest field that ever was opened to a manufacturing and commercial people; to reap the best fruits of our vast Indian empire, and greatly to strengthen its foundations. The looms of England would be in full requisition to clothe the natives of Hindostan, and their willing agricultural industry would give us full freights for our shipping, as well as copious supplies for our consumption of sugar, in return. We might soon so far reduce the commodity in price, as not only to extend its consumption here, to the great increase of our revenue, but to undersell every foreign rival that raises it by Slave labour, in all the markets of the continent. We might thus ultimately put an end to Slavery in the New World, through the competition of free labour, aided by British enterprise, in the Old. Europe and Asia, combining their commercial faculties under the British flag, might deliver Africa from the Slave Trade, and America from its pestilent fruits. The foulest reproach of commerce might be wiped away by the beneficent hand of commerce herself; and the mistress of the seas might obtain a new title to be hailed as the benefactress of mankind, in every region of the globe.

"Nor would these vast and brilliant attainments be counterpoised by any of those heavy burthens in time of peace, or enormous consumptions of our military means and finances in

time of war, to which we are subjected for the security of our Slave-peopled colonies. What these are, and have long been, I cannot with any certainty state. It is high time that the people of England should be enabled, by parliamentary investigation, fairly to ascertain them. Meantime I will hazard an estimate, that our sugar colonies have cost us during the last thirty years, at least an hundred and fifty millions of national debt, and fifty thousand lives.

"In future, they are likely to be still more costly; and unless that cruel and baneful institution which forms their interior debility and danger shall be speedily and effectually reformed, I deem it highly probable that the present generation, which has seen our country in the zenith of its power and glory, may witness also its rapid decline, if not also the total ruin of its greatness, as the just and natural reward of our oppression.

"I can here but briefly notice the sources of this apprehension. They are to be found in the new political positions of almost every region in North and South America, and of every European power that has colonies in either; in the expulsion of France from her settlements in the East, and her colonies in the West; in the new political state of Hayti, and the dubious future relations of Cuba; in the possessions which we have imprudently and perniciously acquired on the South-American continent; and, above all, in the gigantic growth of the United States, in territory and maritime power.

"Let any statesman capable of enlarged views contemplate, under such circumstances, the event of our being soon engaged in new hostilities for the defence of our West-Indian colonies. Let him calculate what the aggravation of the arduous service would be, if North America were hostile, and the ports of Hayti open to her cruizers, or those of our other maritime enemies; as from the bad and offensive return which West-Indian influence has led us to make to the amity of its Government, we have every reason to expect. Let him next turn his eyes to our enormous wide extended possessions in the East; which every maritime state beholds with an envy undisguised, and where France will no longer have to divert her means of annoyance for purposes of defensive war. Let the necessary defence of our new African settlements, and of the Mauritius, also be taken into the account. In the latter, a large stationary force would be necessary to maintain its allegiance to its new,

in a war with its former, sovereign; to native feelings would be added discontent with the abolition of the Slave Trade, and with that real grievance, the heavy tax on their produce imposed, with an unfair partiality, for the benefit of our West-Indian colonies.

"With such new belligerent prospects, whatBritish statesman can contemplate without alarm the usual consumption of our military and maritime means in West-Indian campaigns. Yet our defensive operations there must be now of an extent far exceeding all former precedents. We have now continental, as well as insular, possessions to defend; and they are scattered all the way from the mouths of the Oroonoko, to the Mexican Gulph. Spain, on the other hand, will probably in the western world have nothing to lose, and France nothing to defend, but two nearly contiguous islands, naturally strong, and now rendered impregnable by their certain fidelity to a flag which still protects their Slave Trade. We never had a field of war so barren to us of gain or glory as the Charibean seas must hereafter prove; nor one in which we should present to our old enemies so many vulnerable points. But the difficulty, and the overwhelming expense of defending our sugar colonies, may be still further aggravated, if we should, unfortunately, have among our enemies the United States of America; extending, as they now do, their southern wing all the way to the Mexican Gulph, and possessed of a brave and active marine.

"When confined in the West Indies to defensive operations, the consumption of our naval and military means there, would be an uncompensated evil. No other diversion of them could so widely prejudice our operations in the east, the wrestling place where we shall probably have to put forth all our energies in future wars.

"There is only one effectual preparative against these formidable difficulties, with which we may soon and fatally have to conflict. Let the Black population be conciliated, and its fidelity secured; let the Negroes be raised to a condition in which they can safely be trusted with arms; and then our sugar colonies might be safely left to their interior means of defence.

"But this the Assemblies will not concede; and yet they threaten us, *risum teneatis!* they *threaten us* with their independence!!!

"And what are we to lose by it? A *capital,* they tell us,

which they affect to value at I know not how many scores, or hundreds of millions. The *Poyais* stockholders might as well deprecate on that score the loss of Sir Gregor Macgregor's principality. What is the worth of that capital which never produced, or can produce, on an average, any thing but loss? True, there are prizes in the sugar-planting lottery, and high ones; but I have proved, from their own statements *, and will demonstrate more fully, if necessary, in the second part of this work, that loss and ruin are, and always have been, the lot of a vast majority of the adventurers. I undertake to shew, upon premises established by the concurrent evidence of the most eminent planters and merchants, and by Reports of Committees of the House of Commons, that upon an average of the returns from capital embarked in sugar-planting in our sugar islands, in long periods, comprising the times of their greatest prosperity, there would be heavy loss, instead of gain; without allowing any thing even for the subsistence of the absent proprietors. But as these returns are most unequally divided, in proportion to the capital employed, and very enormously in their amount at different periods, and as it is not the characteristic of the owners of such property, any more than of other adventurers in hazardous speculations, to limit their expenditure by their average incomes, the loss does not fall on themselves alone. When a West-India planter fails, his merchants and mortgagees and creditors in this country are almost sure largely to suffer. When a West-India merchant fails (and how very common an occurrence that is, the commercial world need not be told), the manufacturers and others who are connected with him in this country deeply feel the effects of his ruin, and are often drawn down by his fall. On the whole, it may be safely affirmed, that in a general and collective view, not only is the capital employed in raising sugar by the labour of Slaves wholly unproductive of profit or interest, but no small part of the capital itself is finally lost; and with consequences widely injurious to commercial credit in general.

"We are threatened also with a loss of *revenue*. This will be alarming, when it is shewn that thirty-seven shillings a hundred weight is less than twenty-seven; or that foreign growers of sugar will not send it to the best markets; and also

* "See pp. 92—95, and Appendix No. IV."

that a hundred millions of British subjects in the East, with an immeasurable extent of fertile soil fit for the sugar-cane, cannot supply our consumption. The preposterous position that the import duties on sugar are paid by the colonial grower, and not by the British consumer, is unworthy of a serious answer. Its utter falsehood has been often demonstrated, even before the late repeal of our navigation laws, for the accommodation of our planters; yet its truth is still assumed with as much confidence by every colonial writer, as if the idle paradox were liable to no dispute; and they gravely attempt to alarm us in consequence with a loss of above six millions per annum! If they are right, the import duties on port wine are paid by Portugal, and those on French brandy by France. We have only to import goods enough, and tax them high enough, in order to pay off our national debt out of the purses of the foreigners we buy from. If we could obtain the commodity from themselves alone, and they could sell to us only, or were not allowed to draw back the duties on re-exportation, the doctrine would still be extravagant; but while we exclude all other competitors from our markets, and allow them to feed or starve our consumption at their pleasure, no words can do justice to its absurdity.

"These alarmists forget, that there is no longer any bond but their own interest, for their resort to the British markets. They are now enabled to send their sugars where they please; and they will withhold them from us, of course, if they can get a better price elsewhere. But America, it seems, and other foreign countries, do not choose to accept from them, on the same terms, this large and gratuitous revenue.

"There is an end of the old pretence of our having a monopoly, in return for the charge of protection. The monopoly now is all on one side; and it binds the protectors, not the protected. The loss of our North-American Colonies, however, and its effects, should have much sooner exploded the error, that the dominion of a country is necessary to ensure its commercial preference; and proved, that, if our West-India islands were independent to-morrow, we should not have an ounce less of their sugars, except because we bought them cheaper elsewhere.

"Lastly, we are menaced with a loss of *export trade* and *freight for our shipping*. The very reverse would be the effect of the separation supposed. Our gains in both those

important interests would be extremely great. There is no country on earth where sugar is raised, that would not take a much larger portion of our exports in exchange for that commodity than these Slave-peopled islands, where the labouring class consume scarcely any article we supply, except some coarse clothing, and that in a most scanty degree; and where the owners of the sugar, for the most part, do not reside. I should be astonished, if any representations from that quarter could still surprise me, at finding some of the indefatigable pens now employed in the service of the planters bold enough to speak even of losses to our English landholders. What benefit do these derive from the sugar colonies, to the onerous support of which they so largely contribute? Is it relief in any degree from the burthen of the parochial poor? Almost every other of our trans-marine possessions takes off some small portion of our redundant population, for purposes of agriculture or domestic service; but not one labouring hand finds such employment by emigration to the West Indies. Is it relief to our unfortunate farmers, and their still more unfortunate landlords, by exports of flour or grain? The consumption of such articles in islands chiefly dependent for the food of the Slaves, and of all classes on imported provisions, certainly ought to afford such a benefit, and formerly, in some measure, did so; but now they are supplied almost exclusively from the United States. Even our North-American Colonies must henceforth be excluded from a participation in this trade; and will find no vent for their produce but in our own overloaded markets. They are mocked, indeed, with a small protecting duty on those articles, when the growth of the United States; but as its produce in every island is to go into the insular treasury, and will be a substitute for inferior taxes, it will be no drawback on the economy of preferring foreign flour and grain, to those of British North-America and England.

"They produce to us large returns of manufactures cleared out for their ports; but these, like the rest of their statements and evidence, are, for the most part, fallacious. If, from the amount of such exports, the very large proportion of them, for which our West-India ports are mere *entrepots* for the supply of South America, (a circuity that we no longer are driven to), were deducted, the remainder would be of small account. It would bear, at least, a very minute proportion to the sugar we

take in return; whereas, in Cuba, in Brazil, in Hayti, and, above all, in Hindostan, we might pay with our manufactures for almost every hogshead of sugar or bag of coffee we bought.

"The same considerations apply to our maritime interests. There would be a large increase of outward and no diminution, at least, of homeward freights. Let these threateners prove to us, if they can, that a ton of sugar brought from Brazil or India, will pay a less freight than if it came from Jamaica.

"What, then, should we lose by the independency of our sugar colonies, or their transfer to a foreign power? I answer, if Parliament is not at length prepared to mitigate and progressively abolish Slavery, nothing at all. The saving of blood and treasure in their defence, and of capital in their cultivation, would be pure unbalanced gain. But on the opposite supposition, the loss would be great indeed; a loss so lamentable, that to avoid it we ought to submit to all the evils, and all the privations, that these ruinous possessions subject us to. We should lose the precious opportunity of redeeming the national conscience, and the national honour, by making some restitution; a tardy and imperfect one indeed, but all the restitution in our power, to seven hundred thousand hapless human beings whom we have deeply wronged, the victims of the iniquitous Slave Trade. Were our sugar colonies to be separated from the British dominion, we could not alleviate, we could not progressively terminate, the cruel bondage in which, through our crimes, they have been placed.

"For their sakes, therefore, we are bound still to sustain the heavy burthens I have noticed, to encounter the serious dangers I have anticipated, to renounce the splendid advantages I have described. Justice, sacred justice, is not to be put in the scales against national interest, or even national security. The Ruler of the destinies of nations might frustrate the selfish estimate, and punish the base desertion of acknowledged duties, by evils worse even than those which deliverance from these colonies would avert.

"I am prepared, therefore, to say, that whatever sacrifice the relief of the oppressed Slaves may involve, it is the price of a reparation we are bound to make to them. Let Parliament enter on the work, and their advocates will object to none of the necessary means. I do not except indemnity to their masters, as far as it is justly due. Nay, we might, perhaps, justifiably

go further, and make sacrifices, such as I do not think it necessary particularly here to explain. It might be allowable to relieve the sugar planters at the expense of the people of this country, by making their monopoly of our markets more perfect and more profitable to them for a limited period than it has hitherto been, through fiscal regulations, made subservient to the all important object of correcting their interior system, by insuring a willing conformity to Acts of Parliament to be made for that purpose.

"But if, which may Heaven avert, this sacred duty of the British Legislature is to be abandoned; or, what is the same thing, still committed to the Assemblies; then the measure next in wisdom, and next in justice too, is to take the colonists at their word; and to renounce that dominion over them, the continuance of which will only involve us in deeper guilt, and perhaps in future ruin.

"I say, it is next in justice; because, when separated from the government of a country which yields them no protection, the condition of the Slaves will be less hopeless than at present. If the colonies are to be independent, regard for their own safety may oblige them to conciliate that large mass of their population which they can now safely oppress. If, on the other hand, they shall pass to the dominion of another power, it will probably be one that will not abandon them wholly to the legislation of assemblies, formed and elected by their masters. We hitherto stand alone in that weak and reproachful maxim of colonial policy. Neither Spain, nor Portugal, nor France, nor Holland, nor Denmark, has omitted to make laws in Europe for the protection of the Slaves in their West-Indian settlements, though the two former only have made them with *effect*: nor would the United States, if the sugar colonies should devolve to them, leave Slavery there unmitigated, or unlimited in point of duration. A fundamental principle of their Union alone has prevented the general Congress from mitigating or abolishing the odious institution of the southern States. At all events we should escape, by the supposed separation, the dreadful necessity of shedding the blood of these helpless victims of our power when intolerable oppression goads them again into resistance."

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